

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003805

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/14/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: KMT INSIDERS WATCH MA START AND STUMBLE

REF: TAIPEI 3496

Classified By: AIT Acting Director David J. Keegan, Reason(s):
1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) In a meeting with the Deputy Director on August 24 (reported septel), Taichung Mayor Jason Hu said the recent KMT 17th National Congress was poorly organized, and blamed senior KMT holdovers from Lien's chairmanship for failing to prepare for the procedural and logistics challenges created by proposed voting changes (see ref A). Hu explained that the popular Ma benefited from the rule change allowing the 1,600 national delegates to directly elect the Central Standing Committee (CSC). Had the CSC been elected under the old system by the Central Committee's 210 members, explained Hu, Ma's preferred candidates would have lost badly. The direct election change, however, reduced the effect of "vote-exchange" and other vote-controlling schemes typical of earlier CSC elections. But, in approving the measure, Hu said, delegates voted their self-interest, not their allegiance to Ma's reform agenda.

¶2. (C) Nevertheless, Hu told the Deputy Director, the National Congress proved to be a "rocky start" for Ma. Ma had advocated a proposal to allow students under 27 years of age to participate in CSC meetings to demonstrate the KMT's new emphasis on youth and greater inclusiveness. Ma's inner circle, Hu explained, had operated under the misconception that Ma's endorsement alone was enough to secure the measure's passage. Instead, influential KMT elders and legislators balked at the idea of opening the doors of the KMT's highest policy-making organ to students, and organized to defeat the measure. Hu said a similar measure might have received a warmer reception if, for example, Ma had chosen to welcome students to the less-exalted Central Committee. Hu maintained that Ma's advisors had failed to appreciate the functional difference between the two committees, and did not understand why it was considered inappropriate to invite political novices to participate in senior-level policy discussions. Hu said that, although he supports Ma, he opposed the entry of youth into the CSC.

¶3. (C) Mayor Hu further told the Deputy Director that the 31-member CSC cannot really be broken down into the 10 pro-Wang, 10 pro-Ma, and 11 undeclared ratio widely reported in the press. Rather, he continued, CSC members' loyalties are not so clear-cut, and he speculated that as many as half of the new CSC pro-Wang members may shift to support Ma. At the same time, most of the CSC members were elected without any support from Ma, Hu explained, and have no obligations to him. Some may choose to create difficulties for Ma in order to attract his attention and extract political favors. Nevertheless, Hu said, time is on Ma's side, and most of the CSC members will realize that further weakening of the KMT is bad for their own political fortunes, and will decide to help Ma, if only to help themselves.

¶4. (C) Mayor Hu wondered aloud about Ma's political understanding and innate leadership and decision-making abilities. He told the Deputy Director that he had cautioned Ma several times, after Ma had won the Chairman race, not to publicly apologize to former KMT opponent Wang Jin-pyng for tactics used during the campaign. Wang, he told Ma, would never leave the party because he is an at-large LY member, with no natural constituency of his own, and therefore was wholly dependent on the party for his position, power, and authority. Despite Hu's advice and Wang's repeated rebuffs, Ma did publicly apologize several times. In doing so, Hu said, Ma came across as an insecure leader trying too desperately to win over a former adversary and wasting valuable political capital in the process. Hu told the Deputy Director that he often called Ma during the Chairman race to offer advice on various points but now felt it was time for Ma "to make his own decisions, make his own mistakes, and learn from the consequences." Ma, he said, must set a vision for the party, not just an image for himself. In this regard, Hu said, he had urged Ma to make the KMT more youth-friendly by formulating policies which appeal to voters in the 20- to 40-year-old demographic, including home-buying incentives, educational loans for adults, education subsidies for young children, and reforming Taiwan's military service laws.

¶5. (C) Mayor Hu told the Deputy Director that Chairman Ma

needs a political victory in the year-end local elections. Any KMT gain in the city and county elections, or even the avoidance of a major loss, will strengthen Ma. Hu said the KMT's chances in Taipei County are 50-50, so a victory there would be a credit to Ma. Ma's greatest weakness, however, is his circle of senior advisors, who are perceived within the party as inexperienced and overly aggressive. Many KMT senior leaders were alienated by the Ma campaign decision to accuse openly Wang Jin-pyng of corruption and vote-buying, said Hu. Hu claimed to have warned Ma not to insult Wang unless absolutely necessary -- Ma's advisors said Ma had to use such tactics to assure victory in such a "close" race.

16. (C) Separately, KMT Mainland Affairs Director (and ally of former KMT Chairman Lien Chan) Chang Jung-kung told AIT that those closest to Ma "appear anxious to take power and important party positions," and are costing Ma political support among potential allies. Chang also confirmed that Lien Chan deliberately snubbed Ma by failing to invite him to Lien's 70th birthday. KMT Spokesman Zheng Li-wen separately acknowledged that this had been a great loss of face for Ma. The insult was, according to Chang, motivated by Lien's resentment over Ma's reaction to the March 19, 2004 shooting of President Chen. On the night of the shooting, Ma demanded KMT candidates cease their campaign activities in Taipei. Ma also refused to join Lien in the March 27 demonstration protesting the election outcome. According to Chang, Lien is also upset over Ma's decision to change the Central Standing Committee election procedure, which Lien believes was done not to democratize the party, but to strengthen Ma's control over the CSC.

17. (C) Chang also told AIT that Ma does not have a "clear Mainland policy." Chang speculated that Ma, as a Mainlander born in Hong Kong, is not sure the Taiwanese people will accept him as a presidential candidate in 2008, and that this explains in part why Ma strove to emphasize the KMT's links to Taiwan in his inaugural speech.

18. (C) Comment: In recent meetings with pro-Ma and pro-Lien contacts within the KMT, there has been one consistent refrain: Ma's inner circle of advisors are his greatest liability. Their eagerness, coupled with their inexperience, has rankled senior KMT leaders and party elders, whose cooperation is essential to party reform and KMT voter-mobilization efforts this December. Ma is also criticized for failing, thus far, to craft an overarching vision for the party. Perhaps he is concentrating his attention on securing KMT victories in December. Once that house is in order, Ma may shuffle his "cabinet," to install those more capable of guiding him through the KMT's procedural and political shoals. End comment.
KEEGAN